

NIEHS Responds to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita



As one of the largest research agencies dedicated to using environmental sciences to understand human disease and to improve human health, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), of the National Institutes of Health, is poised to use its expertise and resources to assist in Hurricane Katrina and Rita Recovery Efforts. NIEHS is accomplishing this in a variety of ways.

Partnering With Others to Meet Public Health Needs

Establishing Medical Care Facilities.

Over the Labor Day weekend, 2005 the NIEHS joined with Duke Hospital, under the direction of the NIH, to establish a field hospital in Mississippi to meet the immediate health needs of victims afflicted by Hurricane Katrina.

NIEHS Director Dr. David Schwartz played a lead role in establishing the advance medical team that traveled to Meridian, Mississippi to establish a U.S.

government field hospital at Key Air Field, a National Guard post.

The Meridian field hospital had over 500 beds, and was ready to treat adult and pediatric patients with a variety of medical problems.

Because the needs of patients were met elsewhere, this facility was not needed. However, the medical staff assembled there traveled to other locations to assess and meet immediate medical needs, and found that the medical infrastructure was relatively intact.

Establishment and Participation In Field Public Health Teams.

NIEHS is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the development of field public health teams (FPHTs) to provide assistance with relief and recovery operations along the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina. NIEHS employees with appropriate skills and experience are being deployed for up to 14 days.

An NIEHS researcher participated in an eight-person team that traveled to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on September 16th to serve as an

advisor on the Environmental Health Needs Assessment and Habitability Taskforce. The taskforce established at the request of the Secretary of DHHS and the Administrator of EPA, was charged with identifying the overarching environmental health issues faced by New Orleans to reinhabit the city. The full initial assessment of the Taskforce Report can be found at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/katrina/envassessment.asp>. The NIEHS researcher participated in the development of a follow-up document to this report, which will outline the public health issues for rehabilitation in New Orleans and some of the surrounding parishes, as well as provide guidance on how to assess these issues.

Another NIEHS employee was detailed to the CDC Director's Emergency Operations Center in Atlanta, Georgia, for several days where she reviewed reports coming in from the field, and kept CDC and other public health officials abreast of Katrina-related environmental health threats.

Providing Veterinary Support and Addressing Public Health Issues Related to Diseases that Animals Can Pass to Humans.

An NIEHS employee, who also serves as the Chief Veterinary Officer for the U.S. Public Health Service, has been leading a team of 10 veterinary officers and one public health nurse since September 6, 2005 in providing veterinary care for large and small



animals at two emergency animal shelters set up in Louisiana. Over 5,000 animals have been rescued and there are no contagious disease outbreaks detected at either shelter.

Meeting Immediate Needs of Gulf Coast Families

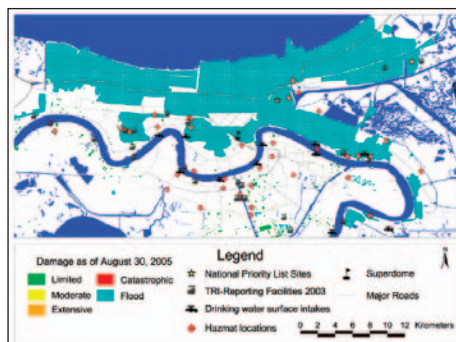
NIEHS employees are providing housing assistance for those displaced from their homes. NIEHS employees are collecting nonperishable food, toiletries, and bottled water to deliver to local NC organizations assisting in hurricane recovery efforts.

NIEHS employees are encouraged to contribute funding to the charitable organizations, including the American Red Cross (<http://www.redcross.org>) and the Salvation Army (<http://www.salvationarmyusa.org>).

Providing Authoritative Information on Environmental Issues

Establishment of a Katrina Website.

On September 9, 2005 NIEHS established a dedicated Hurricane Katrina website on the NIEHS website to provide a comprehensive national resource on environmental issues related to the Hurricane. Included on this website is up-to-date information on safety and hazardous waste cleanup training for the thousands of workers involved in the cleanup and recovery activities in the region, as well as a compendium of environmental health resources for medical responders. The site also includes links to other federal agencies. This website will be continuously updated through a collaboration established between the NIEHS and the University of California, San Diego, super-computing center. As the country responds to the needs of those affected by other natural disasters, including Hurricane Rita, new information will be added to this website.



Minimizing Risk of Exposure By Providing Geographic Information System Maps.

To help expedite clean-up efforts, the NIEHS has worked with its academic Partners to establish a Geographic Information System (GIS) on the NIEHS Response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita website. The GIS system uses satellite maps to plot the locations of chemical plants, refineries, superfund clean up sites, as well as schools and other places, in relation to potential hot-spots of contamination where flooding has occurred. Interactive tools will be developed to help assess exposure and infrastructure damage, and eventually offer advice on remediation.

Offering Medical Consultation.

NIEHS is providing its expertise to the telephone consultation services that NIH has set up for primary care providers and patients in the Katrina disaster zone. The toll free number available 24 hours a day, seven days a week is 1-866-887-2842. The NIH is poised to provide medical consultations on a wide array of medical problems, including environmental/toxic concerns.

Providing Practical Safety Tips and Training To Hurricane Responders.

The NIEHS Worker Education and Training Program (WETP), has developed materials specifically tailored to hurricane responders, including a user friendly "pocket guide," which offers health and safety tips to protect those

helping others. The WETP also continues to work with agencies like OSHA, NIOSH, and others to identify and bring the most relevant training tools to disaster worker, and to identify training needs and opportunities.

Responding to Media and Public Inquiries.

NIEHS staff is rapidly responding to inquiries from members of the public, the media, and elsewhere about Hurricane Katrina and Rita Recovery issues and related topics. As frequently asked questions arise, responses are being drafted and shared with others who may have similar questions, via the website and other means.

Ensuring that Important Research Continues

NIH and NIEHS understand that in many areas, the damage to the research infrastructure has been profound, and that valuable, unique research resources may have been lost, or in all likelihood will be lost. To assist you, the NIH has developed a website and FAQs to serve as a resource for all the biomedical research community. This site includes NIH Guide Notices and other information of particular relevance to investigators and their institutions, and related information, such as links to other Federal sites and links to professional societies that are facilitating interactions between affected investigators (including students, postdocs, etc.) and investigators offering assistance.



For more information on Hurricane Katrina and Rita Recovery Efforts, go to our website at: <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>